

Lesson 10 – 4 April 2010

Abram and God — the Covenant of Faith

Lesson Scope: [Genesis Chapters 15 to 17 and 21](#)

Lesson Focus

God appeared to Abram soon after he had rescued Lot and the people of Sodom (chapter 15). On Abram's return from this miraculous victory, Melchizedek met him and blessed him. Abram gave tithes to Melchizedek as priest of the most high God, but he had refused to keep any of the spoils for himself.

The Lord's words "Fear not, Abram suggest that he needed special encouragement at this time. Abram had refused earthly reward for his deed of mercy. His rescue effort must have seemed in vain when he saw Lot return to the wicked city of Sodom. Furthermore, the Lord's promise to make of Abram a great nation seemed no closer to fulfillment than it had ever been. In these circumstances, God spoke to reassure His faithful servant.

God calls His people to a strong commitment to Himself. As men of faith accept His direction and patiently endure in faith, God leads them in a growing understanding of His purposes.

Try to make this lesson practical to your Christian journey. Notice that God's promised blessings always require obedience and the lesson also shows the vastness of God's plan in providing for His people.

Lesson Aim: To identify principles involved in a covenant relationship with God.

Theme Verse: [Deuteronomy 7:9](#).

“Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God. the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.”

Lesson Text

"Unto Thy Seed Have I Given This Land"

Genesis 15:1-6

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. ²And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? ³And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. ⁴And, 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. ⁵And 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. ⁶And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 15:18

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:

Genesis 16:3

And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.

Genesis 16:16

And Abram *was* fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

"Thou Shalt Be a Father of Many Nations"

Genesis 17:1

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

Genesis 17:4-5

As for me, behold, my covenant *is* with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. ⁵Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

Genesis 17:10

This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

Genesis 17:15-16

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall* her name *be*. ¹⁶And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother* of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

Genesis 17:19

And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his seed after him.

"In Isaac Shall Thy Seed Be Called"

Genesis 21:3-12

And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. ⁶And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, *so that* all that hear will laugh with me. ⁷And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born *him* a son in his old age. ⁸And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the *same* day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. ¹⁰Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *even* with Isaac. ¹¹And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. ¹²And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

Questions for Study

"Unto Thy Seed Have I Given This Land"

1. Why might have God chosen to confirm His covenant at this time?
2. Why are faith and endurance essential in the reward of a covenant with God?
3. Did the fact that God imputed righteousness to him eliminate Abram's need for obedience? Explain.

"Thou Shalt Be a Father of Many Nations"

4. What was the purpose of circumcision?

5. What does the name Almighty God suggest in regard to the promise made to Abraham?

"In Isaac Shall Thy Seed Be Called"

6. Why was it important that Abraham send Ishmael away'?

7. Who was the seed through which all the nations of the world would be blessed'?

Analyzing the Passage

God appeared to Abram in his times of special need, encouraging him) and revealing His plans step by step. Abram expressed concern about the promised seed (Gen.15:3), and the Lord reassured him that the promised child would be his own rather than a servant born in his house. At least fourteen years passed before the Lord promised that Sarai would be the mother of the promised son (Gen.17:16). Sarai's giving Hagar to be Abram's wife (Gen.16:3) does not necessarily show a lack of faith on Abram's part. They were acting, although perhaps impatiently, on the basis of what God had revealed to them thus far. Only when Sarai was ninety years old, and well past child-hearing age, did God reveal that she would indeed be the mother of the promised child (Gen.17:16).

Genesis 17:1 marks the first time that the Lord identified Himself as the Almighty God. The Hebrew original, El-Shaddai, conveys the idea of God as the all-sufficient source of blessing and fruitfulness. Apart from this power. Abram and Sarai could not have had a child in their old age.

Also significant is God's change of Abram's name to Abraham (father of a multitude) and of Sarai to Sarah (princess). Before the promised son was born, God was renewing the covenant and introducing circumcision as the sign of that covenant (Gen.17:10).

Principles and Applications

"Unto Thy Seed Have I Given This Land"

1. God provides stability by revealing Himself in the midst of life's turmoil (Gen.15:1). God revealed Himself to Abram as a shield and a reward. He provides stability because He faithfully fulfills His promises. We are secure because God is our shield. We know that faithfully serving Him brings a sure reward. Even if men would take our life, we are secure, be-

cause they can never destroy our soul.

2. Covenant relationships call for faith and commitment (Gen.15:3-4 and 6). God promised to make of Abram a great nation (Gen.12:2). Later He revealed that Abram's own son would become his heir (Gen.15:4). Still later God revealed that Isaac, rather than Ishmael, would be the son of promise. (Gen.17:21). God reveals His plan one step at a time. We tend to become impatient when God seems slow to meet our need. Faithful endurance is needed to realize the promised blessings.

"Thou Shalt Be a Father of Many Nations"

3. Man benefits from God's covenants as he is willing to lead a holy life (Gen.17:1, 4-5). God's covenants offer man rich blessings but they will be lost if man fails to keep his part of the agreement. God gave Abraham and his seed the promise of Canaan, but He later allowed Judah to be carried away captive because of their disobedience (Jeremiah 34:17-20). Abram saw beyond Canaan to the heavenly city. He saw the greater inheritance that would be far more valuable than any piece of ground on this sin-cursed earth (Hebrews 11:10). What a motivation to walk in holiness!

4. God's covenant requires obedience to divine direction (Gen.17:10). God commanded circumcision as a token or a reminder of the covenant. Only as Abraham obeyed would God multiply him exceedingly, make nations of him, and give him an everlasting possession.

At baptism we vowed to renounce Satan, the world, and our own sinful desires. We promised to submit to Christ and His Word for the remainder of our lives. The need to keep our part of the covenant is ongoing

5. God's covenant will be performed according to His divine plan and purpose. (Gen.17:15-16, 19). Abram and Sarai had ideas about how God might fulfill His promises, but they needed to adjust their thinking as time went on and God revealed more details. Each of those details important in God's timetable.

"In Isaac Shall Thy Seed Be Called"

6. God fulfilled His covenant as He promised (Gen.21:3-4). Isaac was born according to promise at the time God appointed. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4). As foretold, Christ has brought salvation blessings to the people of every nation. There hath not failed one word of all his good promise" (1 Kings 8:50).

7. God's covenant relationship must be in compliance with His intended plan (Gen.21:6, 8-12). God's plan was to fulfill His promise to Abraham

through Isaac. Ishmael would not be part of that blessing or share in the inheritance. God promised to provide for Ishmael but He did not want the child of the bondwoman to be heir with Sarah's child. These two sons typify the contrast between those who are born of the spirit and those who are born of the flesh (Galatians 4:22-31).

Important Teachings

1. God provides stability by revealing Himself in the midst of life's turmoil (Gen.15:1).
2. Covenant relationships call for faith and commitment (Gen.15:3-4, 6).
3. Man benefits from God's covenants as he is willing to lead a holy life (Gen.17:1, 4-5).
4. God's covenant requires obedience to divine direction (Gen.17:10).
5. God's covenant will be performed according to His divine plan and purpose (Gen.17:15-16, 19).
6. God fulfilled His covenant as He promised (Gen.21:3-4).
7. God's continued covenant relationship must be in compliance with His intended plan (Gen.21:6, 8-12).
8. God's covenant rests on His power to perform (Gen.15:18).
9. Covenant relationships are tested when man endeavors to help God fulfill His commitments and promises (Gen.16:3).

Answers to Questions

1. Why might God have chosen to confirm His covenant at this time?
God knew that Abram's faith needed strengthening at this time. Abram and Sarai were getting older, and the natural prospect of having a son was diminishing. God's confirmation gave Abraham hope again.
2. Why are faith and endurance essential in receiving the reward of a covenant with God?
Faith in God is necessary because what is impossible with man is possible with God. Faith is needed because God counts it for righteousness. Endurance is needed because the reward is given only to those who faithfully serve God. The reward may not come for years after the promise. Abraham waited for years, and some of the covenant promises were not fulfilled even in his lifetime. Abram believed God and saw the reward afar off.
3. Did the fact that God imputed righteousness to him eliminate Abram's need for obedience? Explain.

No. Faith produces obedience. A person who does not obey God does not really believe Him. The rewards of obedience are good enough and the punishment for sin severe enough that a person would not disobey God if he believed Him. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26).

4. What was the purpose of circumcision?

Circumcision was given as a token of the covenant, a reminder that Abram and his posterity were specially separated unto God.

5. What does the name Almighty God suggest in regard to the promise made to Abraham?

This name suggests that God was powerful enough to fulfill His promise. Even though it seemed that Abraham and Sarah were too old to have a child, God could and did fulfill His promise.

6. Why was it important that Abraham send Ishmael away?

God's promise was to be fulfilled through Isaac. Ishmael did not share the same faith and consequently did not share in the blessing. Ishmael typified those who are born after the flesh; they may not partake of the spiritual blessings enjoyed by those who are born after the Spirit (Galatians 4:22-31).

7. Who was the seed through which all the nations of the world would be blessed?

Christ provided salvation for both Jew and Gentile; all who receive Him are blessed (Galatians 3:16).

Summarizing the Lesson

"Behold the days come saith the Lord. that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother saying, Know the LORD, for they shall all know, me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Research Guide

1. Read Romans 4:9-13 for inspiration on the token of the covenant of the seed.
2. Read the conditions of the covenant in Genesis 26:3-5.
3. For parallel passages read Genesis 12:7; Genesis 13:14-17; Genesis 15:7-18; Genesis 17:7-10; Genesis 18:18; Genesis 22:15-18; Genesis 28:14-15; and Genesis 35:12.