

The Covenant

GENESIS 15–17

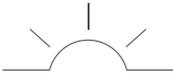
FIRST DAY: Introduction

God's promises and covenants do not depend upon our strengths, schemes, and strivings. When we try to make God's will happen, we employ our feeble nature, our fallible plans, and our finite understanding. This is why our attempts fail so miserably. God knows the perfect time, way, and place to accomplish His will. He requires only our faith and cooperation through obedience.

Through Abram's example we see the problems that are created when we try to preempt God in fulfilling His promises. God made a covenant with Abram to bless him, give him understanding, and bless all the nations through his seed. God made it clear to Abram, through a covenant ritual, that He Himself was responsible to fulfill His Word. When Abram looked at the difficulties and impossibilities of God's plan, he conspired with Sarai to accomplish God's will through his own human efforts. Their plan brought about unforeseen and disastrous problems. However, God in His great grace did not discard His promises to Abram. Instead God reiterated and clarified the work that He alone would and could do.

Are you discouraged by the obstacles to God's promises in your life? Are you tempted to preempt God's plans with your own schemes? Stop! Learn a lesson from Abram's life about how to lean into God and trust Him to fulfill His Word to you.

*Ask God to increase your confidence in His ability
to fulfill His word to you.*



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This is the first time in Scripture that God said, *Do not be afraid*. This same instruction is repeated some 365 times. It is the most repeated command in the Bible.

SECOND DAY: Read Genesis 15:1–7

1. Some time after Abram’s military victory against a conglomeration of kings and his refusal to take the spoils from the king of Sodom, *the LORD came to him in a vision*. What did the Lord say to Abram? Genesis 15:1

a. Considering the events of Abram’s life, why was this word so needed?

b. How does this word speak to you?

2. Although this word was reassuring, Abram was concerned about God’s promise regarding his descendants, because he was still *childless* and his only *heir* was his servant Eliezer (Genesis 15:2–3). God answered Abram’s concern by expounding on His promises. From Genesis 15:4–7 note and comment on the *word of the LORD* concerning:

a. Abram’s *heir* (verse 4)

b. Abram’s *descendants* (verse 5)

c. The *land* (verse 7)

- (1) Record Abram's response to these promises from verse 6.

- (2) This principle of *justification by faith* is so essential, it was reiterated throughout the New Testament. Link Abram's faith with these Scriptures and remark on this:
 - (a) Romans 4:3, 5

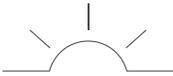
 - (b) Romans 4:20–24

 - (c) Galatians 3:6–7, 9

 - (d) James 2:23

- (3) In Hebrew, the phrase *he believed in the LORD* indicates that Abram put his full weight on God. Share an area of your life in which you desire to follow Abram's example.

3. From your study today, share something that ministered to you concerning:
 - a. God's interaction with Abram
 - b. Abram's response to God
 - c. Your faith being accounted to you for righteousness



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Biblically, a covenant is defined as a *binding agreement of loyalty and fidelity between two or more parties.*

THIRD DAY: Read Genesis 15:8–21

1. Abram asked for confirmation when God promised him the land (Genesis 15:8). God answered by telling Abram to prepare for a covenant. Use Genesis 15:9–11 to describe how this was done.
2. *When the sun was going down, Abram fell asleep, and horror and great darkness fell upon him* (Genesis 15:12). This preceded God's word to Abram about the future of his descendants. Summarize and remark on this word from Genesis 15:13–16, 18b–21 concerning:
 - a. Abram's descendants (verses 13, 14b, 16, 18)

- b. The nation his descendants would serve (verse 14a)

- c. Abram's future (verse 15)

- d. The Amorites (verse 16)

(1) Notice God's statement that *the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete* (verse 16). This indicates that God would give them another 400 years before He judged their sin. Link this with 2 Peter 3:9 and share your thoughts.

3. After these declarations, what did God do? Genesis 15:17–18a

- a. In an ancient *covenant* such as this, the animals would be cut in half. Then **both** parties, coming from opposite ends, would meet in the middle, having passed *between* the pieces. By doing this, they were essentially stating that if either of them broke *covenant* they would deserve the fate of these animals. Why is it significant, then, that only God passed all the way through between the animals?

(1) How did God's actions ratify the certainty of the covenant He made with Abram?

4. Link this covenant with Hebrews 9:15 and share your heart concerning the new *covenant* you have through Jesus Christ.

FOURTH DAY: Read Genesis 16

1. Although God had given Abram promises concerning his descendants, *Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children*. Summarize Sarai's solution to this problem from Genesis 16:1–4a.

a. What do you think prompted Sarai to come up with such a plan?

b. Why do you think *Abram heeded the voice of Sarai* in this matter?

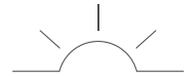
- c. Observe that Abram had been in Canaan *ten years* at this point and was now about 85 years old. Although bearing a child through a concubine was a typical practice in this culture, according to Genesis 16:4, what resulted from copying the cultural solution?

(1) How is this a warning for you? See Proverbs 3:5–6.

2. When Hagar *conceived*, she began to despise Sarai (Genesis 16:4b). As a result, Sarai told Abram, *This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who's wrong—you or me!* (Genesis 16:5 NLT). What did Sarai do next? Genesis 16:6

- a. What do you think of Sarai's actions?
- b. How did Hagar respond to Sarai's treatment?

(1) How might this complicated situation have been averted?



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Note that the mention of God is absent in the first six verses of this chapter. He was also absent from the verses that described Abram's previous decision to travel to Egypt during a famine (Genesis 12:10-16).



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The name *Ishmael* means *God hears*.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Angel of the LORD appeared fifty times in the Old Testament and is mentioned first in Genesis 16:9. Bible scholars widely believe that in times past, Jesus appeared to people in human form as *the Angel of the LORD*.

3. The *Angel of the LORD* came to Hagar in the *wilderness* and began to speak with her (Genesis 16:7–8). Use Genesis 16:9–12 to note and comment on:
 - a. The Lord’s command (verse 9)
 - b. The Lord’s promise (verse 10)
 - c. The Lord’s word concerning Hagar’s son (verses 11–12)
 - (1) How do you see the Lord’s mercy even in this situation?
4. Remark on Hagar’s response to God’s word from Genesis 16:13–14.
 - a. What does it mean to you that God is *The God Who Sees*?
5. Hagar returned and *bore Abram a son* when he was eighty-six years old (Genesis 16:15–16). What do you find noteworthy about her decision to return?

6. Drawing from your lesson today, why do you think it is folly to involve human schemes in an attempt to fulfill God's promises?

FIFTH DAY: Read Genesis 17

1. Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God again *appeared to Abram*. Use Genesis 17:1–8 to cite the following:

- a. God's self-identification (verse 1a)

(1) This name in Hebrew is *El Shaddai*, meaning *all-sufficient, all-powerful God*; it is the first instance in which God identified Himself by this name. Why do you think God revealed Himself to Abram in this way?

- b. God's command (verse 1b)

(1) The word *blameless* means *single-hearted, sincere, wholly devoted to the Lord*. Why do you think God required this?

- c. God's *covenant* (verses 2–8)

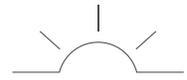
- (1) The name *Abram* means *exalted father*, while *Abraham* means *father of a multitude*. Considering Abram's condition, why was this remarkable?

- (2) Notice in verse 5 that God said He had made Abram *a father of many nations* **before** he had a legitimate son. Link this with Romans 4:17b and share your thoughts.

2. In Genesis 17:9–14 God commanded Abraham and his household to be circumcised. Note that God made His covenant with Abraham before he was circumcised. Circumcision, thus, became an outward indication of a covenant that was already established. Link this passage with Deuteronomy 30:6 and Colossians 2:11 to explain the true significance of circumcision.
 - a. Why do you think God required this before the promise could be fulfilled?

3. In Genesis 17:15–16 what did God tell Abraham about his *wife* Sarai?

- a. Remember, at one point Sarah thought God's promises did not include her. Now God made a special mention of Sarah's part in His covenant with Abraham. How does this minister to you about your inclusion in God's promises?
4. Read Genesis 17:17–21 and remark on:
 - a. Abraham's response to God's word concerning Sarah (verses 17–18)
 - b. God's covenant to Abraham (verse 19)
 - c. God's promise concerning Ishmael (verse 20)
 - d. Isaac (verse 21)
 5. After God *finished talking* with Abraham (Genesis 17:22), he immediately acted on God's instructions. What does this convey to you? Genesis 17:23–27



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Sarai and *Sarah* both mean *princess*. Bible teachers often point out that God removed the “i” from Sarai’s name and inserted “yah,” a form of His own name.

6. In Genesis 17 God used the word *covenant* thirteen times and promised *I will* thirteen times. What does this reveal to you about God?

SIXTH DAY: Review

1. From your study this week in Genesis 15–17, use the following chart to highlight the progression of God’s promises to Abraham concerning:

<i>The Land</i>	Genesis 15:7	Genesis 15:13–21	Genesis 17:8
<i>His Descendants</i>	Genesis 15:4–5	Genesis 17:4–7	Genesis 17:15–16, 19–21

a. Why do you think God repeated His promises?

