

Bible Stories for Adults

God's Covenant with Abraham

Genesis 15, 17

Opening

- Gathering: Give an example of a time when you doubted God, but then He proved to be faithful.
- Today's Focus: To recognize that God calls us by His grace, just as He called Abram, and we are to respond obediently out of faith, just like Abram.
- Key Verses: *The Lord is faithful to all His promises.* Psalm 145:13
- Those who believe are children of Abraham. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.* Galatians 3:7, 14
- Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.* Hebrews 9:15

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Promises to Abram (*Genesis 12-13*)

- What promises did God make to Abram when He called him? = Write on board
Genesis 12:2-3 = great nation, bless you, name great, be a blessing, all blessed through you
- What was Abram's responsibility under this agreement, and did he fulfill it? = Separate column
Genesis 12:1, 4 = Leave & follow God
- What did God promise after Abram obeyed and arrived in Canaan?
Genesis 12:7 = This land to his offspring
- What did God promise after Abram let Lot choose the choice land? = Add to board
Genesis 13:14-16 = All visible land, offspring like dust of the earth
- What was Abram's responsibility under this agreement, and did he fulfill it? = Check on board
Genesis 13:17-18 = Leave & follow God
- What did God promise Abram after he rescued Lot and gave a tithe? (*Genesis 14*) = Add to board
Genesis 15:1 = I am your shield (protect you) & great reward (bless you)

Blessed Abram (*Genesis 15:2-5*)

- Did Abram get to see God's promises to him fulfilled?
Hebrews 11:8-9, 13 = No, but he accepted them by faith, fulfilled later
- Did God fulfill any of His promises during Abram's life?
Genesis 13:2 = Yes, God blessed him materially
- Did Abram feel fully blessed?
Genesis 15:2-3 = Didn't see how promises could be fulfilled without an heir
- How did God respond to Abram's confusion and doubt? = Add or check on board
Genesis 15:4-5 = Restated promise and elaborated on size - like stars in heavens

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Faith Credited as Righteousness (*Genesis 15:6*)

Did this help or did Abram continue to doubt?

Genesis 15:6 = He trusted God - his faith was *credited to him as righteousness*

Was Abram considered righteous because he obeyed God's instructions?

Romans 3:10, 20 = No, no one obeys the law perfect enough to be righteous

Then why was he considered righteous?

Romans 4:1-3 = His faith was *credited to him as righteousness*

Did Abram's good works and obedience help earn this righteousness at least a little?

Romans 4:4-8 = No, righteousness can only be received as a gift through faith

How does Paul explain this in a summary of the gospel?

Ephesians 2:8-9 = *By grace you have been saved through faith ... gift of God*

Promise Guarantees (*Genesis 15:7-8*)

Did Abram have any further doubts after God restated His promise of descendants?

Genesis 15:7-8 = He asked for help believing the promise of land

How were pledges and promises formally guaranteed in the days of the patriarchs?

Genesis 31:44-46, 48-50 = Jacob & Laban made witness heap, God is witness

Blood Covenant - Used as an absolute and unbreakable guarantee of critical agreements

Bound two parties together as one

Very serious & solemn = Reserved for only special & critical agreements

3 large animals split down the spine, halves spread on ground opposite each other

"May this happen to me if I break this covenant" - see Jeremiah 34:18

Parties exchanged coats - exchange of authority, What I have is yours

Exchanged weapons - My strength is yours, Your enemies are mine

Walked twice through *The Way of Blood* = Trail of blood between halves

Met each other in the center

The Blessing of the Covenant - Stated pledges of agreement

Pronounced a curse for breaking the covenant

Parties swore by their god, making him a third party

The Cut of the Covenant - Cut hands & wrists, bound together to intermingle blood

Joined names together

Ate a covenant meal of bread & wine together (Bread for flesh, wine for blood)

Represented willingness to lay down lives for each other

God's Covenant with Abram (*Genesis 15:7-18*)

How did God show Abram how serious He was about His promises?

Genesis 15:9-10 = God had Abram prepare a blood covenant

How did God make this a one-sided covenant where all Abram had to do was accept it?

Genesis 15:11-12 = Waited all day until Abram tired and fell asleep

What was *The Blessing of the Covenant*? = Land from Brook of Egypt (Wadi, SW of Gaza) to Euphrates

Genesis 15:13-16, 18 = Told details of when, how and what

How did God handle the covenant ritual of walking twice through *The Way of Blood*?

Genesis 15:17 = Smoking firepot & blazing torch passed between pieces

What was the meaning behind the smoke and fire? = Represented God's presence

Exodus 13:21 = God stayed with Israelites in pillars of cloud & fire

How did God guarantee His covenant with us?

Hebrews 7:22; 9:12 = Jesus guarantees the better covenant by his own blood

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God's Covenants with His People = What other major covenants did God make with His people?

- . Genesis 9:8-9, 11 = With Noah, never destroy creation with a flood, rainbow
- . Exodus 19:3-6 = With Israelites on Mount Sinai, be my chosen people
- . 2 Samuel 7:8, 11b-13 = Promise of an eternal kingdom from David's offspring
- . Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8) = Make a new covenant with Israel, all will know me, I will forgive
- . 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 = The new covenant of salvation is guaranteed by Christ's body & blood
- . John 14:2-3 = In my Father's house are many rooms, I go to prepare a place for you

God Confirms His Covenant (*Genesis 17:1-14*)

Did Abram fully trust in God's promise and covenant despite his lack of an heir? = 11 yrs after leaving Haran
Genesis 16:1-2, 16 = No, he decided to help God with a plan that would work
What did God do 13 years later to show that He had not yet begun to fulfill His covenant promise?
Genesis 17:1-2 = Confirm His covenant, Would greatly increase Abram's numbers
How did God point out that this really was the time? = Name change indicates change point in life
Genesis 17:3-5 = Changed his name; *I have made you a father of many nations*
Abram ? Abraham = the (my) father is exalted ? father of many

What promises did God confirm? = Add to board
Genesis 17:6-8 = make fruitful, nations & kings from you, your God forever, Land of Canaan
Was this another one-sided covenant or did Abraham have a responsibility?
Genesis 17:9-11 = All males circumcised, visible sign reminding Israel of special calling
Circumcise = to separate, cut off - become a separate people cut-off from evil world
Was this covenant sign only for Abraham and His descendants? = Or they would be cut off
Genesis 17:12-14 = Anyone to be part of Abraham was to be cut off, made separate for God

God's Covenant Through Sarah (*Genesis 17:15-16*)

How did God point out that the life change was not only for Abraham?
Genesis 17:15-16 = Changed Sarai's name to Sarah
Sarai = Possibly name of moon goddess in Haran
Sarah = means princess, royalty would come from her - Mother of nations & kings

Abraham's Disbelief (*Genesis 17:17-19*)

How did this differ from Abraham's understanding of God's plan?
Genesis 17:17-18 = He thought God would fulfill promises through Ishmael
How did God respond to Abraham's disbelief in God fulfilling His impossible promise?
Genesis 17:19 = Isaac means "he laughs", Name would be constant reminder of Abraham's disbelief
How had God introduced Himself to Abram, and why?
Genesis 17:1 = *El Shaddai* (God Almighty), total control over nature, inc. Sarai's barrenness
Jeremiah 32:27 (Matthew 19:26) = *I am the Lord (Yahweh) ... Is anything too hard for me?*

Was Abraham able to trust God in faith despite his initial disbelief?
Hebrews 11:11-12 = By faith Abraham became the father of multitudes
But what about Abraham's only son at the time, Ishmael?
Genesis 17:20-22 = He would be blessed (father of Arabs), but covenant would be through Isaac
How long did it take Abraham to complete what God commanded?
Genesis 17:23-27 = *On that very day*, Every male as God commanded
What is the significance of circumcision instituted before Isaac?
Colossians 2:11-13 = Chosen to be *cut off* from sinful world before child of covenant can come

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Justified by Circumcision? (*Romans 4*)

Was Abraham justified (deemed righteous) & blessed because of circumcision?

Romans 4:9-11a = Abraham was righteous by faith, before he was circumcised

Are God's promises to Abraham's descendants only to the Jews (circumcised)?

Romans 4:11b-12 = promises to those of faith, not circumcision

How did Abraham receive the promise? By obeying the law?

Romans 4:13-15 = No. Promise received through the righteousness that comes by faith

How can we be heirs to the promises God made to Abraham?

Romans 4:16-17 = Promise comes by faith; Abraham is father of the faithful in God's sight

Why did Abraham believe God's promise of offspring when he was past age?

Romans 4:18-22 = He believed God had the power to do what He said He would do

How can righteousness be credited to us?

Romans 4:23-25 = Righteousness will be credited to those who trust in Christ

God Visits (*Genesis 18:1-15*)

How did God make clear to Abraham the sincerity and certainty of His promise to bring Isaac?

Genesis 18:1 = He appeared to him again - in clear daylight

Did Abraham recognize God? = Recognizing God is possible when you live in a right relationship with Him

Genesis 18:2-8 = Welcomed them heartily, washed feet, gave food & rest – extra bread to send

What was God's message to Abraham?

Genesis 18:9-10 = To announce the coming of a promised son

How did Sarah respond to God's message?

Genesis 18:11-12 = She laughed to herself since she & Abraham were too old

Would Sarah's laughter or age (90) interfere with God's plan?

Genesis 18:13-14 = Is anything too hard for the Lord? She will have a son within a year

Did Sarah confess and repent of her unbelief?

Genesis 18:15 = No, she lied and denied her unbelief; God fulfilled His plan thru her anyway

They Called Him Laughter (*Genesis 17:19*)

Isaac means *laughter*. Why did God pick such a name?

Genesis 17:17 = Abraham laughed at the idea of having a child at 100

Genesis 18:10-15 = Sarah laughed at idea of child at 90, then denied it

Genesis 21:6-7 = Sarah said, God has brought me laughter & everyone will laugh with me

Genesis 17:19 = God said to call him Isaac, God laughs with pleasure in giving His grace

What other biblical births were received skeptically?

Luke 1:31, 34-37 = Jesus born of virgin, John the Baptist born to old Elizabeth

Closing Prayer

Response

1. What promises has God made to me? (*John 14:1-4; Acts 1:4-5; 2:38-39; Romans 1:2-6; Galatians 3:14, 26-28; 4:28; Ephesians 3:6; Titus 1:2; 1 John 2:25*)
2. How has He begun to fulfill these promises?
(*Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56; Psalm 145:13b; 2 Corinthians 1:20; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 3:9*)
3. How do I respond to the promises God has made to me?
(*Joshua 23:9-16; Romans 4; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 11:13-16; 2 Peter 1:4-8*)
4. Do I recognize when my faith falters? How can I deal with my unbelief?
(*Deut 1:32; 9:23-24; Matthew 8:24-27; 14:29-31; 16:8; 17:19-21; Mark 9:23-24; 16:16; Luke 11:13*)
5. Do I live my life as one who is righteous in God's sight? How must I change? (*Ephesians 4:17-5:21*)