

The Gospel Project Session 7 – God’s Covenant With Abraham

**Through Abraham, God chose a nation through which He would _____
the curse of sin and _____ the world as His Kingdom.**

What exactly is a covenant?

Many times, we think of a covenant as a contract. A contract requires both parties to exchange something or to take a particular course of action. If one party fails to live complete their portion the other may void the contract. However, a covenant is so much more, especially in our relationship with God. A covenant is an arrangement where parties agree to keep their commitments regardless of what the other party does.

This new reality also changes our view of our relationship with God. Why? Because the Bible describes God’s relationship with His people as a covenant. Yet people often think of their relationship with God as a contract: “I have to do my part and be a good person, and if I do, then God will uphold His end of the deal by blessing me right now and taking me to heaven when I die. But if I do good and God doesn’t give me what I want, then I’m outta here!”

- **Have you or someone you know ever made a deal with God?**
- **Why do you think we have a contractual attitude toward relationships rather than a covenantal one?**

In this session, we will learn that God is a covenant-making God. Because of sin, the people on earth had been separated from God (Eden) and each other (Babel), but God chose one man, one family, through whom He promised to reverse this separation. This promise was later fulfilled through Abraham’s descendant—Jesus of Nazareth. And this promise continues to be fulfilled today through the mission of Jesus’ church as peoples from all over the world become part of God’s family through faith in the gospel.

1. God initiated a _____ relationship with mankind. (Gen. 12:1-4)

¹ The LORD said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who

bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you. ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.

The pronoun “I” appears several times in the Lord’s speech to Abram. What does this tell us about God’s commitment to His glory and His plan of redemption?

Through Abram’s descendants, God will reverse the misfortunes of Eden (separation from God) and Babel (separation from each other). God will reverse this tragedy by means of a covenant relationship with Abram in which He made three promises to him. God promised Abram land, offspring, and blessing.

Promised Land

First, He promised Abram land, and in connection with that, He commanded Abram to leave his land and travel to another land. This text ends with Abram obeying God’s command and leaving Haran for Canaan—the promised land. Abram’s obedience was an expression of his faith in God’s promise.

Promised Offspring

Second, He promised offspring when He said that He would make Abram into a great nation. This promise continued the promise of Genesis 3:15. At several key points, God refers to Abram’s “seed” (15:5; 17:8), and this promise becomes the primary focus of the stories about Abram in Genesis because of his wife Sarai’s difficulty having children.

Promised Blessing

Finally, God promised to bless all the peoples on earth through Abram and his offspring. These verses are key because they set the stage for the rest of history. God’s plan is to seek out and save all the peoples of the earth, not just a few. He wants to be the covenant Lord of a people made up of all nations on earth. From Abram would come the Israelites, who were called to be a light to the nations, drawing them to worship the one true, living God.

God’s initiation of relationship with Abram required Abram’s _____ to the call.

- **Has God ever called you to do something that made no sense from the world’s perspective? What was your reaction? Was it difficult to trust God?**
- **What was your reaction? Was it difficult to trust God?**

2. God commands us to _____ that He will keep His _____.
(Gen. 15:1-6)

God made wonderful promises to Abram, but Abram and Sarai did not have any children. Both of them were old, and Sarai was well past the years of being able to conceive. So Abram began to question and even to take matters into his own hands.

¹ After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great. ² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what can You give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Abram continued, "Look, You have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir."

Abram looked at the promises and his situation, and he thought that he would try to help God along. If we're honest, we'll admit this kind of doubt is understandable. There are times in our lives when the promises of God do not look so promising.

- **In what areas of your life do you often struggle with trusting the promises of God (financial, marital, parental, relational, etc.)?**
- **In what ways have you taken matters into your own hands to ensure the outcome you want?**
- **How can we resist this tendency?**

In the midst of Abram's doubt, God came to him and restated the promises and even added to them. And Abram believed!

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then He said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

So Abram believed the promise of God, and God counted it to him as righteousness. In Galatians 3, the apostle Paul pointed to Abram's faith as a model of saving faith. Paul argued that we are not justified (declared righteous before God) by trying to keep the rules (Gal. 3:11). Those who break God's law are cursed, and we're all law-breakers. But the good news is that Christ became that curse for us on the cross (3:13). Justification only comes through faith in Jesus, and just as with Abram, God credits His righteousness to our account (3:6-7). Today, we too are called to trust the promises of God.

- **In what ways do we imagine our relationship with God is dependent on how well we keep His rules?**
- **What kind of person will a rules-focused life cause us to become?**

Paul's argument in Galatians also helps us see how God will continue to fulfill His promise to make Abram's offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Paul made it clear in Romans and Galatians that being the offspring of Abraham is not about your DNA but about faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:11-12; Gal. 3:7).

"Saving faith is faith in God's provision, not our performance." –Tim Keller

3. God desires for His people to be set apart for His glory (Gen. 17:1-14).

The Lord bound Himself to Abram and his offspring by means of a covenant. He even committed to take the curses on Himself if these things did not come true (Gen. 15:7-21). But what is our responsibility in this relationship?

¹ When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him, saying, "I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be blameless. ² I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly." ³ Then Abram fell facedown and God spoke with him: ⁴ "As for Me, My covenant is with you: you will become the father of many nations. ⁵ Your name will no longer be Abram, but your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. ⁷ I will keep My covenant between Me and you, and your future offspring throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. ⁸ And to you and your future offspring I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as an eternal possession, and I will be their God." ⁹ God also said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations are to keep My covenant. ¹⁰ This is My covenant, which you are to keep, between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every one of your males must be circumcised. ¹¹ You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin to serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and you. ¹² Throughout your generations, every male among you at eight days old is to be circumcised. This includes a slave born in your house and one purchased with money from any foreigner. The one who is not your offspring, ¹³ a slave born in your house, as well as one purchased with money, must be circumcised. My covenant will be marked in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ If any male is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that man will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

The Lord called Abram to walk blamelessly before Him, and then He restated the promise that He would multiply Abram's offspring and that he would be the father of many nations. So the Lord changed Abram's name to "Abraham," which means "father of a multitude"

- **What does the fact that we are part of God's chosen people teach us about the nature of God's love for us?**

- **As a part of His chosen people by faith in Jesus, how does God relate to us?**

Then God gave Abraham a sign of the covenant, a physical marking to set apart Abraham's family so that everyone would know they were God's people. Today, we can think of this as being similar to how a married couple will exchange rings. The ring is a visible symbol of the covenant of marriage.

In Genesis 17, God gave the sign of the covenant between Himself and Abraham, one that Abraham and his offspring were to keep as an everlasting covenant—male circumcision. Every male would be circumcised as a sign of the covenant, and thus be set apart from all the other peoples of the world. Keeping this covenant was a serious matter because anyone who was not circumcised would be cut off from the God's people

In order to truly be a blessing to the nations, the children of God would need to maintain their distinction from the world. The same is true for us today. We are to be set apart from the rest of the world, not by physical circumcision but by the circumcision of the heart. Our lives should bear the marks of God's redeeming grace.

God entered into a covenant relationship with Abram in Genesis 12, and through that relationship He intends to bless the world. That promise has come to fruition through Jesus of Nazareth. God enters into an unconditional, loving covenant relationship with all who are in Christ.

God's covenant with Abraham shows his faithfulness is the key to our eternal salvation. Once we accept God's offer of covenant, it cannot be changed. He will not change. Future acts are not required on our part. The finality and eternal assurance of our salvation comes from God's everlasting power and his holiness which means a covenant he makes will not be broken.

Not only should that truth give us hope that frees us from the guilt of falling short of God's glory, but it should propel us out into the world so that "all the families of the earth" might be blessed by Jesus.

Interestingly, God gave this promise to Abram in Haran. Today, Haran is in southeastern Turkey, a region that is heavily Muslim and resistant to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The place where God promised to bless all peoples is not receiving that blessing right now through Abraham's offspring, Jesus Christ. Our task is to be a light to the world, bringing the blessing of the gospel to all the people groups on Earth. This is why God calls the Church to pray for the unreached, give to send missionaries to the unreached, and go to the unreached so they can receive the blessing of God through the gospel.