

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Genesis 17:1 - 18:15

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Abraham and Sarah

Key-location: Canaan

Key-repetitions:

- The Lord appeared to Abram/Abraham: Abram was ninety-nine years old when the Lord appeared to him (Gen 17:1); on another occasion, God, with two angels who looked like men, appeared to Abraham (Gen 18:1-2).
- Covenant (Gen 15:18; 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 21).
- God promises Abraham numerous descendants (Gen 17:7-8, 16-21; 18:9-15).
- Name change: Abram to Abraham (Gen 17:5); Sarai to Sarah (Gen 17:15).

Key-attitudes:

- Abraham's faith in God.
- God's absolute authority.
- Abraham's submission to God's authority.
- Sarah's disbelief when she heard the Lord say she and Abraham would have a son.
- Sarah's fear when God asked Abraham why Sarah laughed.

Initial-situation:

Abram and his nephew Lot had separated, and Lot went to live close to the wicked city of Sodom. Sarai and Abram had no children. Sarai told Abram to sleep with Hagar, her Egyptian slave girl. Hagar became pregnant and gave birth to Abram's son, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

Initial-problem:

Abram was ninety-nine years old when God appeared to him and promised that he would have a huge family.

Final-situation:

The Lord asked Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

BIBLE STORY

God's Covenant of Circumcision with Abraham

Abram was ninety-nine years old when the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; obey me and do what is right. I'll confirm my covenant between us and will give you a huge family."

Abram fell flat on his face, and God said to him, "This is my covenant with you: You'll be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham. You'll be the father of nations; kings will come from you. This is a permanent covenant between me and you and your descendants. I'll be your God and the God of your descendants. I'll give the land of Canaan as a permanent possession to you and your descendants; I'll be their God.

"You and your descendants must honor my covenant. Circumcise every male. Circumcision will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male in your household who is eight days old must be circumcised" (Gen 17:1-14).

"No longer is your wife's name Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I'll bless her and she will give birth to your son. Sarah will be the mother of nations; kings will come from her. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son and you'll call him Isaac. I'll establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (Gen 17:15-22).

On that very day, Abraham, his son Ishmael and every male in Abraham's household were circumcised. Abraham was ninety-nine years old and Ishmael was thirteen years old (Gen 17:23-27).

Abraham Receives Three Visitors

On another occasion, God, with two angels who looked like men, appeared to Abraham while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. The Lord told Abraham, "I'll return to you next year at this time, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son." Sarah was listening at the tent door, just behind the Lord. Abraham and Sarah were already old. Sarah laughed to herself thinking, "My husband and I are too old to have a baby!"

The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'I'm too old to have a baby?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you about this time next year and Sarah will have a son!" (Gen 18:1-15).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What covenants did God establish between himself and Abraham?
2. What did God promise to do and what was Abraham required to do?
3. What are some promises that God makes to us that also require us to act?
4. What did Abraham do to show that he had faith in God?
5. What can we do to show people that we have faith in God?
6. Why did Sarah think it was impossible for her to have a son?

7. Why is God able to do what seems humanly impossible?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Meeting another person's need for food and/or shelter is a practical way to obey God.** Abraham eagerly showed hospitality to the three visitors (Gen 18:2-5). In Abraham's day, the way a person shared his home and food determined the reputation that was given to him. The New Testament teaches that we, like Abraham, might actually entertain angels (Heb 13:2).
2. **God's covenant with a person is a contract between himself and the person, and both are required to meet the terms of the covenant.** God established a covenant between himself and Abraham. The terms were simple: Abraham's part was to obey God and circumcise all the males in his household; God's part was to give Abraham heirs, property, power and wealth (Gen 17:5-14).
3. **The person who agrees to obey God receives blessings that far outweigh whatever he must give up.** God made a covenant between himself and Abraham. The terms were: Abraham would obey God and circumcise all the males in his household; God would give Abraham heirs, property, power, and wealth (Gen 17:5-14).
4. **Faith and obedience go hand in hand. A person who has faith in God will obey divine instructions.** Abraham manifested his faith in God's covenant promise to make him a father of nations (Gen 17:6-8), by accepting God's sign of the covenant and circumcising himself and all males in his household (Gen 17:22-27).
5. **God is omnipotent and nothing is too hard for him.** It was physically impossible for the elderly Abraham and Sarah to have a child, but God had the power to give them a son (Gen 18:12-14; 21:1-2).
6. **Fear may become an incentive for lying.** Sarah was afraid of being discovered, so she lied (Gen 18:15).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Twitter Prayers (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in "twitter" length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about the story.
- How they are similar to or different from Abraham and Sarah.
- Occasions when they knew God was bringing changes in their lives.
- Occasions when they doubted God would keep his promises.
- Decisions they need to make as a result of hearing the story.
- How the story helps them to know God better.