

**GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**  
**Genesis 16:1–18:15**

**Memory Verse:** *"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless"* (Gen. 17:1b ESV).

**Background Helps:**

In this week's readings, we see in Genesis 17 that God confirmed the covenant he made with Abram in Genesis 15, while adding still more detail. Let's briefly highlight the story.

Genesis 16 – Ten years have passed (cf. Gen. 12:4 with 16:16) since God first gave Abram the promises (Gen. 12:1-3, 7). He then formalized these promises in a covenant (Gen. 15), but Abram still had no child. So Abram's wife, Sarai, and Abram took matters into their own hands and determined to bear a child through Sarai's servant, Hagar—a custom common at the time but contrary to God's will. (Compare the modern practice of surrogate motherhood.) A son Ishmael was conceived from the union of Abram and Hagar, along with a lot of trouble! But notice that the angel of the Lord still promised to multiply the offspring of Hagar (16:10) since they would be children of Abram.

Genesis 17:1–18:15 – God allowed thirteen more years to pass after the birth of Ishmael. He was stretching Abram's faith! Now the Lord confirmed his covenant with Abram. Notice the additional detail he gave to the covenant:

- God promised (1) to multiply Abram greatly (v. 3); (2) to make him the father of a multitude of nations (and accordingly changed his name to "Abraham") (vv. 4-5); (3) to make him exceedingly fruitful, producing nations and kings through him (v. 6); (4) to establish an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his offspring and to be their God (v. 7); and (5) to give Abraham and his offspring the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession and (again) to be their God.
- God made comparable promises to Abraham's wife, Sarai: He changed her name to Sarah and promised to bless her, to give Abraham a son by her, and to produce nations and kings through her (vv. 15-16). Although Abraham pleaded with God to bless his son, Ishmael, and God conceded to grant him a measure of blessing (vv. 18, 20), yet the Lord made it clear that the *covenant* blessing would be transmitted through Sarah's son, Isaac, whom she would bear within a year (17:19, 21; 18:9-15; Rom. 9:8-9).

Among other things in this covenant with Abraham, notice the following: (1) God's earlier plan to bless and multiply the descendants of Adam (Gen. 1:28) and then Noah (9:1, 7) has now been given to Abraham and his descendants (16:10; 17:2, 4-6, 16, 20); (2) for the first time, God uses the expression "I will be their God" (17:8), a recurring covenant formula throughout the Scriptures, often with the addition, "and they will be my people"; (3) the apostle Paul makes reference to this covenant when he quotes God's promise to Abraham, "I have made you the

father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5) in Romans 4:17 and says that God has made him “heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13).

God also required Abraham to make a right response to these covenant promises: (1) “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1, our memory verse); and (2) the rite of circumcision, which Abraham obeyed (17:9-14, 22-27). Compare circumcision, the sign of the covenant with Abraham, and the rainbow, the sign of the earlier covenant with Noah, (Gen. 9:12-17): in the case of Noah, the sign of the rainbow was an act of God; in the case of Abraham, the sign of circumcision was an act of Abraham. The apostle Paul makes an important point in Romans 4:9-12 with reference to the sign and seal of circumcision: circumcision was given to Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14) *after* he was already declared righteous by faith (Gen. 15:6), so that Abraham would be the father of both circumcised and uncircumcised believers, that is, both Jews and Gentiles.

### **Lesson Helps:**

A possible aim: My students will learn more about God’s covenant with Abraham, so that they will believe in Jesus Christ and be baptized as a sign of their covenant with God.

Continue to set the context for God’s covenant with Abraham in the overall biblical narrative (see Background Helps above).

Then, like last week, conduct an in class Bible exploration of the promises that God gave to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-8, 15-20; 18:9-15. Notice how the LORD broadens the covenant, giving more and more detail. List the promises on the board. You might want to show how these promises are ultimately fulfilled through Jesus Christ (for example, see Rev. 7:9-10; 21:24).

Then, once again, consider how Abraham and Sarah responded to these promises. We certainly see evidences of unbelief and disobedience in Genesis 16 and even in 17:17-18 and 18:9-15. But their overall response of faith and obedience is made clear in the story and in Romans 4:18-22 and Hebrews 11:8-12. Also, take note of Abraham’s obedience in Genesis 17:22-27: he promptly circumcised all the males in his household, just as God had commanded.

Finally, invite your students to put their faith in Jesus Christ (or to confirm that faith) and, if they have not already taken this step, to demonstrate their faith in baptism. Baptism is the sign of our obedience under the new covenant, just as circumcision was the sign of Abraham’s obedience. You might briefly review New Testament commands and practice with regard to faith and baptism in Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12; 16:31-34; 18:8. Notice especially that Paul draws an analogy between the Old Testament practice of circumcision and the New Testament practice of baptism in Colossians 2:11-12.

### **Home Assignment:**

 Read Genesis 21:1–22:19.

 Memorize Hebrews 11:1.