

GOD MAKES A COVENANT WITH ABRAM

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: GENESIS 15



God's grace to us is revealed in the calling of Abram.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

God took initiative with Abram and responsibility to fulfill the conditions of the promise – In this passage we once again see God taking initiative with sinful man in the unfolding of His plan of salvation. It was God who called out to Abram. It was God who made the promise. And it was God who made a covenant with Abram to mark His promise.

Abraham believed against the face of logic – Paul, in his letter to the Romans, explained Abraham's belief. "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, 'So shall your offspring be.' He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." (Romans 4:18-21)

Abraham's faith in the Lord was credited to him as righteousness and is recorded for our benefit – Paul continued in Romans 4. "That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." (Romans 4:22-25)

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WHERE IS JESUS?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

God made a promise to Abram that through him all nations would be blessed. Abram himself would not be the one to bless all peoples; the one who would one day fulfill that promise is Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:26 – 4:7:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Once we were slaves to sin, but through faith in Jesus Christ, God adopts us and makes us sons! So, we become one of those stars that Abram saw when he looked up to the sky!

ON THE ROAD TO EMMANUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Psalm 6:4

Connecting the passage to Christ:

David cried out to God, "Save me for the sake of your steadfast love."

John tells us:

For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17).

Questions for reflection:

- How does David's prayer line up with the purpose of God in John 3:16-17? (God's salvation is based upon His love for us.)
- We can join David in praying this same way to God. As a class, write a prayer on the board in keeping with Psalm 6:4 and John 3:16.

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SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

NUMBER THE STARS

Supplies:

library book or Hubble photos of stars from the internet (see web site below)

Write the number three followed by sixteen zeroes on the board. Ask the children what they think the number represents. The answer is that this number, 3 thousand million billion, is the number of stars some estimate are in the Milky Way Galaxy. Estimates on how many galaxies there are range from 80 billion to 500 billion. NASA claims there are zillions of uncountable stars.

Check out <http://www.stsci.edu/outreach> for images from the Hubble telescope. Pick out an image with a mass of stars which illustrates the impossibility of counting them.

Ask the children why God would have shown Abram the stars and asked him to count them. Psalm 19:1 tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God." The majesty of God is seen in the beauty and awesome nature of the night sky. To see the stars and know that God created them points to His power and the fact that He can do what He says He will do.



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A CONTRACT WITH GOD

Supplies:

a copy of your mortgage
or lease agreement
(sanitized of critical
information)

Tell the story behind your contract and read a portion of the responsibilities imposed on you in the contract. For instance, in a mortgage or lease agreement you are required to make payments on time. If you don't keep up your part of the contract, the bank or landlord doesn't need to keep up their part of the bargain. In the case of a home, the bank could take it back. In the case of an apartment they could evict you to the street. Usually there are requirements which must be met by the two parties to keep the contract or covenant.

In the case of God's covenant with Abram, all of the responsibility belongs to God. God promised Abram that he would give him the land of promise, a son to be an heir to that land, and that He would make His descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky. He even promised Abram peace, and that he would live to be a good old age. In those days the sacrifice was the way that men expressed their covenant commitment. Abram did bring the animals the Lord requested, but that was more like the paper of your lease agreement.

Even though Abram did not see how God's promise could be logically fulfilled, he believed that the God who created the stars could do what He promised. We are now descendants of Abram. In many ways the promise to Abram was a promise to us. Each of us is represented by a star in the sky! (We are not assigned a particular star as though we each have our own, but in God's illustration, there is at least one star for each of us.)

At night when we look up at the stars and see God's amazing majesty we can be sure He knows each of us by name. His promise through Jesus, a descendant of Abram, applies to us as well as one of Abram's more direct descendants.



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CANDY COUNT

Supplies

- a large bag of M&M™ candies
- small plastic cups (one for every person in the class)
- four dice
- a classroom table

Tell the children you are going to play a game. Line up eight children along a table, four on one side and four on the other. Give them a cup full of twenty candies each.

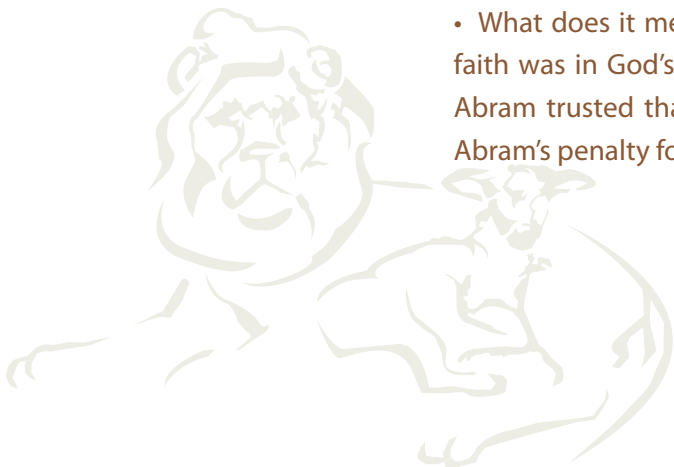
Explain to them that they are going to compete with the person across from them. Each pair will take turns rolling one die. Subtract the two rolls and the difference should be paid by the person with the lower number to the person with the greater number. So if one person rolls a six and his opponent rolls a one, the person who rolls the one needs to give up five of his candies to the person who rolled the six. Have each group play eight rounds.

Repeat the exercise to give everyone a chance to play. Announce early that the penalty for eating the candies during the game is the loss of all their candies. (Enforce this once and the rest of the class will gladly comply.)

Now for the illustration: Half-way through the game pick out a few children for whom you pay all their losses. This should cause a stir. Simply reply that they should count the candy as full payment and not object. After giving everyone a chance to play, invite the children to eat their booty.

Then lead them in a discussion with the following questions:

- How was my paying the M&M's for some of you like Jesus paying for our sin? (The required payment was paid in full.)
- What did the person I paid do to make sure the penalty was paid accurately? (He counted the candies to make sure you paid the correct amount.)
- What does it mean that God counted Abram's faith as righteousness? (Abram's faith was in God's plan. Abram believed God would do what He promised. And Abram trusted that God would justify him. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross fulfilled Abram's penalty for sin, so God credited Abram with Jesus' righteousness.)



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A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

Read Genesis 15:12-14 and ask the class if they know what the phrases below are prophesying about.

- Your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs – (Refers to the Israelites living in Egypt after famine forced them to take refuge there.)
- And will be servants there – (Egypt eventually enslaved the Israelites.)
- I will bring judgment on the nation – (God sent multiple plagues on Egypt.)
- They shall come out with great possessions – (The Egyptians gave the Israelites their gold and other precious articles as they left.)

Take time to remind the children that God's deliverance of Israel is a picture of God's deliverance of us from our sin. God was very aware of how these events connected to Jesus and how He would lead His people out of bondage. We are all sojourners in this earthly kingdom awaiting our deliverance into God's heavenly kingdom.

PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

Supplies

- magazines and catalogs
- glue sticks
- scissors,
- one large poster board

The first and second grade children can use the preschool coloring sheet and questions. Have the older children use the magazines and to cut out people of every tribe and race and glue them in a collage on a piece of poster board. Make sure you have magazines and catalogs which have a diversity of races and dress. (Also preview the images for modesty.) Read Revelation 7:9-12, explaining to the children that the people worshipping around the throne are the result of the fulfilled promise given by God to Abram. It was Jesus' death on the cross that made a way for all of them to enter into heaven.

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FOR OLDER GRADES

Supplies:

- paper and pencils

Have the children read both Genesis 15 and Romans 4:13-25, comparing the two passages. Have them list what we learn from Romans that is not included in the Genesis account. The most important thing that is added in Romans comes from verses 23 and 24. Paul tells us that these words were not written just for Abraham but for us as well. We also can have faith in Christ credited to us as righteousness just as Abram did.

A LITTLE BIT MORE

Counted to him as righteousness – This phrase is found both in application to Abram but also in application to all those who trust in Christ's work on the cross (Romans 4:24).

God can count our faith as righteousness because our faith is in the redemptive plan of God in Christ. A debt paid on your account by another person would be credited and counted to you. If someone pays your bill, your bill is paid. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin. When Abram believed in God's redemptive plan, he was believing in the redemptive plan of Christ, not his own works. In God's mercy He accepts this faith and counts it good to Abram's debt as a sinner. When we believe in Jesus and His finished work on the cross, God counts it to us as righteousness in the very same way. Ultimately, it is Christ's righteousness which fills our accounts with good; not our works, but His work.

