

Challenge 5: THE PROMISE - ABRAHAM

Between Genesis 11 and 12 there's a time shift, and also what we might call a shift in focus. Before now, God has been telling us how things went wrong with the world: rebellion, leading to sin, leading to more rebellion, judgment, and separation from God. We'll see sin and judgment repeated through the rest of the Old Testament—but now God will begin revealing His plan to fix the problem, once and for all. Out of the curse of sin He will bring forth blessing. He begins his master plan with a man called Abram, whose name will later be changed to Abraham. Abraham is the most important character in Genesis, and the first of the four major characters we'll encounter in the Old Testament.

In some ways, his life doesn't seem very exciting. He's old when we meet him—already 75! But Abraham's life was filled with drama, laughter, thrills, and even terror, as we'll see. One reason Abraham is important is because of the promises made to him as part of God's covenant. Some of those promises will be fulfilled within the chapters we read this week, but others will have to wait for several years, even hundreds of years. The greatest promise of all won't come about for *thousands* of years. **Covenant** is a word that we've already encountered, and will again throughout the Old Testament, but God's covenant with Abraham, you might say, is the granddaddy of them all. This week we will begin to get an idea why.

Readings for this week: Genesis 12:1-9; 14:8-18:14; 21:1-7 (for younger kids, you may want to omit chapters 14 & 16 and questions 5-6)

Further references: Hebrews 11:8-16, Galatians 3:5-9

Key Verse: "And [the Lord] brought [Abram] outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them . . . So shall your offspring be.' And he believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Gen. 15:5-6

Thought questions:

1. Gen. 12:1-9: these verses are known as the "call" of Abram. Research "Ur of the Chaldeans" on Wikipedia or in a Bible dictionary. What was God calling Abram *out of*? What was He calling Abram *to*? Compare 12:2 with 11:4—what key difference do you see?
2. A covenant, remember, is an agreement, with rewards and responsibilities on both sides. God makes eight promises in 12:1-9—what are they? What is Abram's part of the deal?
3. In Bible times, covenant ceremonies like the one described in Gen. 15:7-19 were common, with one important difference: *both* parties were supposed to walk between the animal parts. The idea was that if either of them didn't keep his promise, he deserved to split in half like one of those animals. Why does Abram not make this walk? What is his only responsibility (vs. 6)?
4. Why did God think of Abram as righteous? (see Gen. 15:6) What does *righteous* mean?
5. In Gen. 14, Abram seems to have a powerful little army. Why doesn't he just take the land God promised him?
6. In Gen. 16, Sarah takes matters into her own hands. What problems does this cause?
7. Isaac is a "promise baby" (there are several of these in the Bible), whose birth is foretold ahead of time. His birth was a miracle, because his mother was too old to have children. Compare Sarah's laugh in 18:12 with her laugh in 21:6. What does the name Isaac mean?

Activities:

- Draw a short comic strip of 3-4 panels showing how God acted out the covenant in Genesis 15. Or, make an abstract painting showing how Abram felt (see verse 12). Or, write a description of the scene from his point of view.
- Draw four columns on a page of notebook paper. In the first, write the scripture reference where a covenant promise appears. In the second, write the name of the person the covenant is with, and his age (if the age is given). In the third, write what the man's responsibilities are (if any), and in the fourth, list God's covenant promises, each on a separate line. This week, all the promises are with Abraham, and they'll be found in 12:1-9, 15:1-7, and 17:1-10. Put a check mark beside the ones that come true in this week's reading.