



Lesson 6 / March 26, 2017

## COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:1-9; 15:1-6

### Key Verse

“And Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

Genesis 15:6

### Question 11: What is God’s covenant with Abraham?

Short Answer: *God covenants with Abraham to bless all people through him.*

Full Answer: *God covenants with Abraham to bless him, to make him into a great nation, and to bless all people through him; and Abraham must respond with faith, obedience, and circumcision.*

### Question 12: What is faith?

Short Answer: *Faith is trusting in God alone.*

Full Answer: *Faith is trusting in God alone, having forsaken trust in self and all others, resting assured of our hope in his promises, and humbly obeying his word.*

### Discussion Questions

1. Why does God divide up languages through the Tower of Babel?
2. Describe the covenant God makes with Abraham. What promises does God make? What does God expect from Abraham?
3. What is the nature of Abraham’s faith?
4. How do we see Abraham’s faith at work in his life?
5. Read Hebrews 11:8-19. Why do you suppose Abraham becomes such a premier example of faith even though he made such horrible mistakes?
6. How does Jesus fulfill God’s promise to Abraham?
7. What does it mean to have faith like Abraham today?
8. How are we made righteous by faith today?
9. Are you walking in Abraham’s footsteps of faith?

## Summary

After a devastating flood, it is time to rebuild. God has blotted out all of evil mankind, leaving behind only righteous Noah and five of his family members. But sadly, Noah's descendants prove to be just as evil. They use their common language to unite themselves together and build a tall tower as a tribute to their own greatness (Genesis 11:1-9). But their ambitious project reveals their evil pride, so God judges them by turning their tower into a Tower of *Babel* (= confusion). God confuses their speech by dividing humanity into different languages and nations so they will have to disperse across the earth.

In about the year 2100BCE, God chooses one person, Abram, to be the father of God's special people. God makes a covenant with Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 that contains several very important promises. First, God promises to personally bless Abram and make his name great. Second, God promises to multiply Abram's descendants and make them into a great nation, the nation of Israel. Thus, God later changes his name from Abram, meaning "exalted father," to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude" (Gen 17:5). Third, God promises to bring universal blessing to all mankind through Abram's descendants. In addition, God promises the land of Canaan to Abram as a dwelling place for his offspring (Gen 12:7). Finally, God commands Abraham to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant that would set apart Abraham's offspring from all other nations (Gen 17).

Abraham responds to God's promises with faith so extraordinary that he will become known in Scripture as the greatest hero of faith. Faith is hearing, believing, and depending upon God alone. This means taking God at his word and trusting God rather than self. Abraham has faith in God even when God is slow in fulfilling his promises, even when God's promises seem very unlikely, and even when God's commands are downright baffling. At 75 years old, Abraham goes in faith to the promised land of Canaan, and he continues to trust God even though he never actually possesses the land in his lifetime. Indeed, God finally gives the land to his descendants nearly 600 years after Abraham is good and dead! On another occasion, Abraham trusts God's promise that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, even though at the time Abraham was childless

and quite old. Genesis 15:6 describes his response: "he believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6), even though God would not provide his first son until Abraham was "as good as dead" (Heb 11:12). And again, in perhaps his greatest demonstration of faith, Abraham takes God at his word and obeys God's baffling command to sacrifice Isaac, his only son of the promise, until God suddenly intervenes and provides a ram as a substitute for the sacrifice (Gen 22). Still today, Abraham is our premier role model of faithful faith.

Yet Abraham's faith, though extraordinary, is far from perfect. In fear, Abraham lies about Sarah being his wife and gives her in marriage to someone else, even though God promised to give Abraham offspring through her . . . and Abraham does this twice! (See Gen 12:10-20 and 20:1-18.) After ten years of waiting for his first descendant, Abraham grows impatient with God and conceives a child, Ishmael, through an adulterous affair with his servant Hagar (Gen 16). From imperfect Abraham we learn that we can have saving faith even if we are not perfect, for God in his grace counts the faith of an imperfect person as righteousness. And faith itself need not be perfect, for faith is measured not by its own perfection, but by the perfection of its object. So long as our faith is in God, our faith is sufficient, for God is perfectly faithful. Nevertheless, may God increase the measure of our faith!

Abraham is a towering figure in the Bible and his story lays the groundwork for all that follows. The rest of the Old Testament tells the heartbreaking story of God seeking to make Israel into the great nation he promised to Abraham, a nation through which God could bless all the nations, but the people of Israel repeatedly fail to remain faithful to God and his covenant. Time and again they reject God and refuse to believe his word until it becomes a crisis: Will God ever bless all the nations through Abraham's offspring? Then, finally, 2000 years after Abraham, Jesus Christ is born as a descendant of Abraham, and Jesus is perfectly faithful and perfectly righteous, and Jesus fulfills God's promise to Abraham and brings blessing to all people from every language and nation. So today, the apostle Paul tells us that Abraham is not only the father of the people of Israel, but he is also the father of all who believe, so that anyone who believes can receive the righteousness that comes by faith (Rom 4:11). May we, then, walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham.