

# THE LORD MADE A COVENANT

## MAIN POINT.

God will always keep  
His **promises** to us.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

God credited Abraham with righteousness on account of his faith (**Gen. 15:6**). Therefore, all who have faith in God, who raised Jesus from the dead for our salvation, are declared righteous. They are also considered as Abraham's children so that he indeed would be the father of many nations (**Rom. 4:3**).



## **COVENANT** — A PROMISE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

### Genesis 15

### Genesis 17

#### **GOD IS COMMITTED TO HIS PEOPLE**

##### **GENESIS 15:8-13,17-18**

8 But he said, "Lord GOD, how can I know that I will possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 So he brought all these to him, cut them in half, and laid the pieces opposite each other, but he did not cut the birds in half. 11 Birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was setting, a deep sleep came over Abram, and suddenly great terror and darkness descended on him. 13 Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be resident aliens for four hundred years in a land that does not belong to them and will be enslaved and oppressed." . . . 17 When the sun had set and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the divided animals. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram.

#### **GOD KEEPS HIS WORD**

##### **GENESIS 17:1-8,15-19**

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him, saying, "I am God Almighty. Live in my presence and be blameless. 2 I will set up my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you greatly." 3 Then Abram fell facedown and God spoke with him: 4 "As for me, here is my covenant with you: You will become the father of many nations. 5 Your name will no longer be Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I will make you the father of many nations. 6 I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. 7 I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. 8 And to you and your future offspring I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as a permanent possession, and I will be their God." . . . 15 God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah will be her name. 16 I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her." 17 Abraham fell facedown. Then he laughed and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a hundred-year-old man? Can Sarah, a ninety-year-old woman, give birth?" 18 So Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael were acceptable to you!" 19 But God said, "No. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will confirm my covenant with him as a permanent covenant for his future offspring."

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

Leaders: Thank you for preparing to teach God's Word. As you do, may He teach you new and wonderful truths (Ps. 119:18).

God will always keep His  
**promises** to us.

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### GOD IS COMMITTED TO HIS PEOPLE

#### GENESIS 15:13

"For Abram, God's message was clear: In spite of the prospects of death and suffering (enslavement in bondage), he and his descendants would eventually receive the promises, for God had sworn to it. So Israel could be encouraged by this at the time of the Exodus and in subsequent times of distress."<sup>5</sup>

#### GENESIS 15:17-18

"God is the initiator and consummator. Abram is dependent on the Lord to achieve the promises; he only has the divine word to rely on. Abram is the passive recipient of the divine will. His status in the arrangement between the two parties is illustrated when the covenant is formally ratified (15:8–15). Abram is a witness to the covenant ceremony, not a participant (15:17); only the Lord (symbolized by the firepot) passes through the animal parts."<sup>6</sup>

"Fire represents the consuming, cleansing zeal of the Lord, as well as his unapproachable holiness—two things that are interrelated (Isa. 6:3–7). Abram saw nothing else in the vision except these fiery elements as they passed between the pieces of the slaughtered animals. Thus, the holy God came down and cut the covenant with Abram. Since God could not swear by anyone greater, he swore by his own life (Heb. 6:13). In other words, this was a unilateral covenant; its promises were absolutely sure because they did not depend on what Abram or his descendants might do."<sup>7</sup>



## CONTEXT

The context of the covenant in Genesis 15 gives us a glimpse of God's heart for humanity. We see Abram take part in a traditional blood covenant, which was performed between two parties to solidify an agreement, sometimes even between a bride's father and her future groom. Each person walked the path of slaughtered animals as a declaration, essentially saying: "If I don't keep up my end of the deal, may this be done to me." Here, only one party walked the path: the Lord. **He alone "cut a covenant" while Abram sat in darkness.** Abram could never keep up his end of a covenant with God because of sin, so God walked in his place in the form of fire and smoke. **Fulfillment rested on God alone, not on Abram.** God is covenant maker and covenant keeper. The connection to us? Jesus walked in our place. He was the promise fulfilled. Salvation comes from His ability to be faithful, not ours.

God also explained that Abram's descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years but that He would free them at the right time. Moses, the author, intended to encourage his audience with this reminder of God's faithfulness after their Exodus from Egypt—another reminder that God always keeps His covenant.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

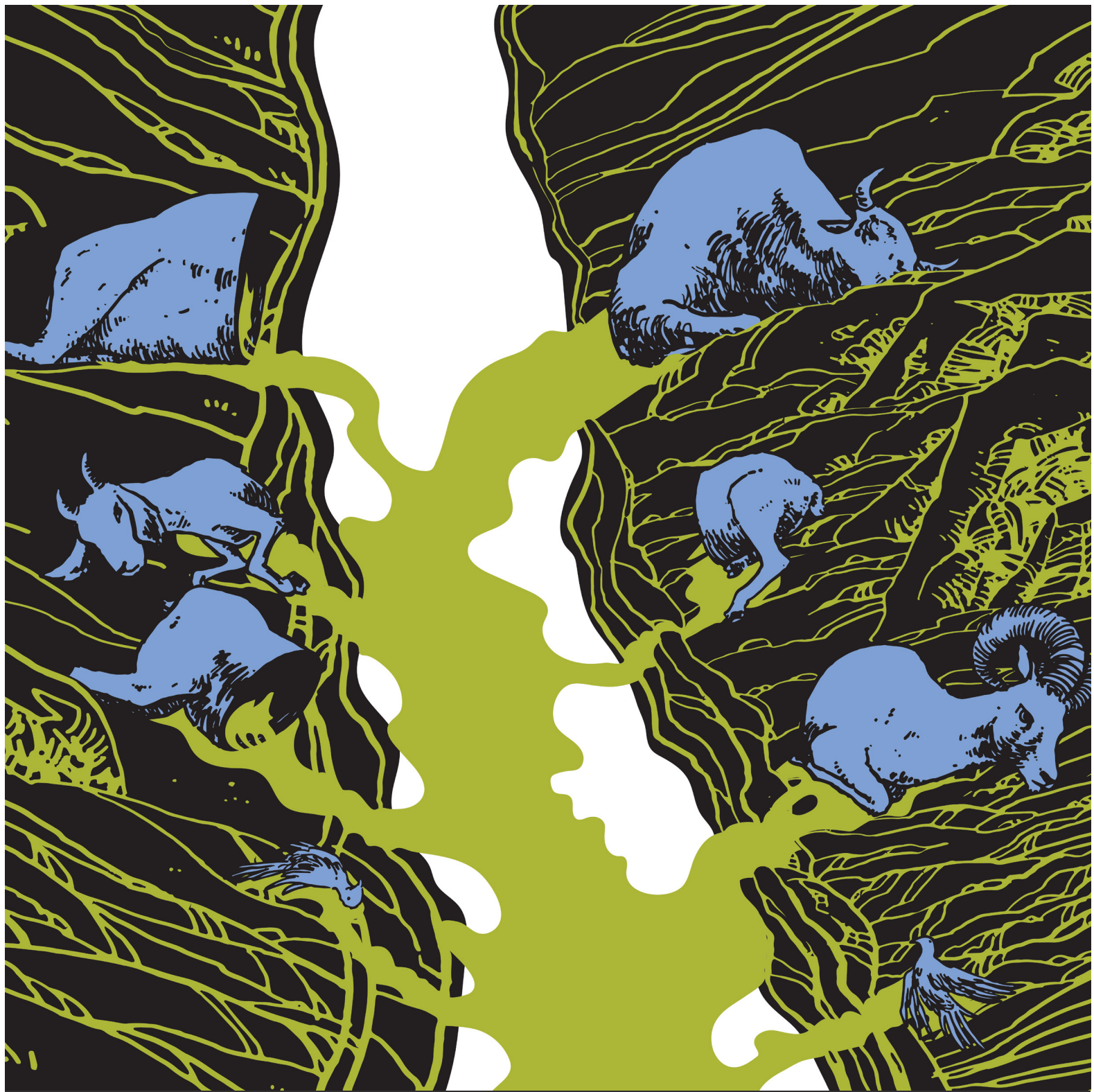
### the church

The New Testament speaks of the church as the body of Christ, which includes **all of the redeemed from all the ages**: believers from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

## LEADER'S PRAYER

GOD, THANK YOU FOR FULFILLING YOUR  
WORD. HELP ME WALK IN FAITHFULNESS  
TO YOU.





## KICK STARTER

### *DID YOU KNOW?*

A handshake signifies more than a greeting. It's a form of signaling a **promise**, and it likely originated thousands of years ago. People shook hands to show they weren't holding a weapon and had nothing to hide in making a deal.

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

# 1

## CHANGING SHAPES

### **SUPPLIES LIST:** INDEX CARDS, TIMER

Before your group meets, create ten index cards with amounts of time ranging from ten seconds to one minute, at five to ten second intervals. Then, create ten shape cards with simple things like a smiley face, exclamation point, fish, and so on. Fold the cards and place them in separate cups. During your gathering, explain that you'll draw a shape card and time card and students must move to create the shape in the time allowed. Don't put a shape or time card back in the cups. When you get through all the shape cards, the game is over.

The shapes were always changing, sometimes quicker than others. Our lives change in a similar way. But no matter how much our lives, or our selves, change, God is always the same and so are His promises.

# 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Is it difficult to trust others? And how do you trust God when you can't see Him? Well, to know God is to know He is trustworthy. Trust is a big deal in our society. Actually, it has always been a big deal. Once trust is broken, it's very difficult to regain. If you've experienced betrayal, then you know how difficult this can be. You may have experienced such deep betrayal that you find it hard to trust anyone. And when this happens, that struggle can hinder our ability to trust God. Can we really trust Him to take care of us? To guide us? To help us? Here's what we have to remember: God isn't like us. We break promises, but God does not. We look out for ourselves, but God looks out for His creation. We are faithless, but God is faithful. So, yes, you can trust God to take care of you, to guide you, and to help you. He won't ever go back on His word. God already fulfilled His word with Jesus's death on the cross. He's absolutely worthy of our trust.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

God will always keep His **promises** to us.

## GOD IS COMMITTED TO HIS PEOPLE

READ GENESIS 15:8-13,17-18

### WHAT DOES ABRAM'S QUESTION IN VERSE 8 REVEAL ABOUT HOW HE MAY HAVE BEEN FEELING?

Since leaving home, Abram had separated from his nephew, Lot, and fought in a battle to rescue him from four kings who had taken him as a prisoner. Abram also still didn't have an heir—his own child with Sarai—so he had named his house servant as his legal heir. **It's understandable that Abram could have experienced some doubt or frustration.** Time had passed, and it didn't seem like God was going to fulfill the promise.

### GOD STEPPED INTO ABRAHAM'S PLACE IN THE COVENANT RITUAL. HOW IS THIS SIMILAR TO JESUS TAKING OUR PLACE?

Share the context about the blood covenant before asking this question. Christ walked in our place when He walked the road to Calvary and was crucified for the sins of humanity. He paid the price for our inability to keep the covenant with God. In essence, **Jesus did the exact same thing on the cross as the Lord did when He walked the blood path in Abram's place.**

### WHEN HAVE YOU STRUGGLED TO BELIEVE IN GOD'S PROMISES?

If you study Scripture, you'll see God's promises throughout the Old and New Testament. We'll never see that God promised an easy life though. He never promised we'd be free from sickness, pain, suffering, or grief. He never said we'd escape feeling left out and lonely. Because we live in a fallen world, these things will come into our lives. And sometimes when we face difficult situations, we can get mixed up in our heads and feel as if God isn't with us or that He's breaking His word to us. That's when we must remember what God actually said: He'll never leave us; He is faithful to save us; He wants us to live abundantly; He is our comfort and peace. **God doesn't delight in your difficult circumstances any more than you do. But your circumstances, just like Abram's circumstances, don't define who God is or cancel out His promises.**

## GOD KEEPS HIS WORD

READ GENESIS 17:1-8,15-19

### WHAT DID GOD TELL ABRAM TO DO IN VERSE 1?

God told Abram to live in His presence and be blameless. Don't miss this. God basically says, "walk with me and know me. Then be like me." That's it. It wasn't a list of rules; Abram didn't even have the Ten Commandments yet! **Jesus invites us to know Him and follow Him, and He promises to be with us always through His Spirit living within us (Matt. 28:20).**



### WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD CHANGING ABRAM'S NAME IN VERSE 5? WHAT DOES THIS REVEAL ABOUT GOD?

Abram's name essentially means "exalted father." God changed his name to Abraham, meaning "father of multitudes."<sup>8</sup> Encountering God changed Abraham's identity. His entire purpose changed. **And when we meet Jesus, we're adopted into this family—into the multitude. The church body is Abraham's inheritance!**

### ABRAHAM WAS SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OLD WHEN HE LEFT HIS HOME; HERE, HE WAS NINETY-NINE. WHAT DOES THIS TEACH YOU ABOUT THE TIMING OF GOD'S PROMISES?

Many of us are horrible at waiting. Even when it comes to God's calling, we must sometimes wait. But each of those seasons has a purpose. Waiting produces endurance. It builds our faith. We grow and become who we need to be while we wait. **We can know that God isn't slow in keeping His promises (2 Pet. 3:9). We can trust God's timing because He sees the entire picture while we only see this moment.**

## WRAP-UP

### IN WHAT AREA OF YOUR LIFE DO YOU STRUGGLE TO TRUST GOD? HOW CAN YOU TAKE STEPS TO TRUST HIM THIS WEEK?

Trust is having complete faith in someone or something. It's believing wholeheartedly that this person or this thing will come through. When it comes to trusting God, we sometimes allow our circumstances to cloud our faith in Him. Maybe you're struggling to trust Him with your worry and anxiety about the future. Maybe you're struggling to trust Him with your family because it's a mess. Maybe you're lonely and feel like you don't have a single real friend, and you can't see how God would allow this. Maybe you're struggling to trust that God can free you from some type of addiction. You can trust God with all of these things. You can release your grip and wait on Him. **He promises to be with you in all things—even the hard things, especially the hard things. He will come through because His very nature is to be faithful.**