

THE THREAD

DISCOVERING THE THREAD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH THE BIG-PICTURE STORY OF THE BIBLE

PART 1: BEGINNINGS

LESSON 5 || ABRAHAM AND THE BIRTH OF A PEOPLE

SESSION SNAPSHOT

NARRATIVE PASSAGE: Genesis 12:1-5a; Genesis 15, Genesis 21:1-7

GOSPEL FOCUS: Galatians 3:25-29

STUDENT TAKEAWAYS:

- See how God laid the foundation for a special people through His covenant with Abram.
- Understand that, through Christ, God extends the covenant offer of adoption to all who would come to faith in Him.
- Consider ways in which the Gospel has the potential to bring people together who may otherwise not be.

OVERVIEW:

Family is important. It plays a large part in shaping who we are and where we find belonging. In this lesson, we're going to look at how God began the process of choosing His people. We'll see His faithfulness and grace extended to a man named Abram, the father of the Israelites. It will be clear that God chose His people not based on what they had to offer but on His grace and purpose. The culmination of the story, like all stories in the Bible, is Christ. Jesus offers a place to belong, a family to all those who place their faith in Him.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *Thread* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide the basic context for the passages you'll be studying.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible study lesson, we encourage teachers to help students know *who* wrote a particular book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHY TEACH CONTEXT?** Grasping the big-picture view of God's story of redemption is difficult for teenagers without understanding the context of the books and passages they're studying.

GENESIS

- *Author:* While there's no specific author named within the text, Moses is the accepted author for Genesis, with some editing and additions done after his death (such as the account of his death!).

- *Time frame:* It's difficult to establish with any certainty a date for the completion of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). Most of the material originated from Moses himself, and depending on the date of the Exodus (which is also not known for sure), the date for the writing of Genesis is estimated to be sometime in the 1400s or 1200s BC.
- *Purpose:* Genesis details the earliest history of our world, including creation and Adam and Eve's fall. It also focuses on the emergence of Israel, not only as God's people but as the group that God would work through to bring redemption to the world.

GALATIANS

- *Author:* Paul, the persecutor-of-Christians-turned-missionary, is the author of the letter to the Galatians (see Acts 7:57-8:3 and 9:1-31). After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul set out on several journeys to proclaim the salvation available through Jesus and His death and resurrection. Several churches were planted as a result of Paul's leadership, including the church in Galatia.
- *Time frame:* Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians sometime between 48 and 53 AD, most likely by 49 AD.
- *Purpose:* The primary purpose for Paul's letter to the Galatians was to respond to a particular issue: a group of Jews—claiming to also be Christ-followers (many early Christians were Jewish Christians)—had begun to argue that Christians are not just saved by faith, but that they were also required to keep the Mosaic Law. This, of course, went against everything Paul knew to be true about Jesus. The main thrust of Paul's teaching was that there is no work we could accomplish to be saved (Ephesians 2:8), including keeping the Law (Galatians 2:16).

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- **GETTING STARTED**– An introductory activity designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- **THE STORY**– A section featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- **THE THREAD**– A special emphasis where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- **WRAPPING UP**– An application-focused segment helping teenagers ask the question, “How am I impacted by what I learned today”?

GETTING STARTED

- *Goal:* Students will be introduced to the concept of receiving an unbelievable inheritance.
- *Set-Up:* None.

FIRST, tell your students the story of Athina Onassis Roussel. Say something like this:

- Athina Onassis Roussel is the granddaughter of Aristotle Onassis. Onassis was a Greek billionaire and married to former first lady, Jacquelyn Kennedy, until his death in 1975. Why does this matter? Great question. In 1988, when Athina was three years old, Roussel’s mother passed away, making her the sole heir to her grandfather’s billion-dollar estate. Trustees managed the money until 2003 when, on her 18th birthday, Roussel received her inheritance. The inheritance was valued at an estimated \$2.7 billion. Crazy, right? A billionaire at 18 years old. So here’s the question: What would you do if you inherited a billion dollars?

Allow students a chance to answer. No doubt you’ll get answers all over the place, which is perfect the crazier the answers, the better. After everyone has had an opportunity to answer, you could ask the group to choose the best answers and, depending on your group, the worst.

THEN, lead a brief discussion about inheritance. Ask something like this:

- Roussel received an unbelievable inheritance. In your own words, describe what an inheritance is.
 - *Answers will vary.*
- Why do you think she had to wait until she was 18 years old to seize control of the money? (You could even point to some of your group’s worst answers as evidence of why it’s wise to wait.)
 - *Answers will vary.*
- Even when she didn’t have full control of the inheritance, to whom did it belong?
 - *Answer:* Her. The inheritance was still Roussel’s even though, for a period of time, other people were given the power to decide how it was spent.
- When you receive an inheritance, who does the work? Who receives the benefits?
 - *Answer:* The person leaving the inheritance did the work. The person who receives it gets the benefits. An inheritance is an expression of grace: you receive something you don’t deserve.

FINALLY, tell your students that in your lesson today, you’ll examine God’s promise of an inheritance to a guy named Abraham and his descendants. Like, Roussel’s fortune, there are elements of the inheritance that were received immediately and other elements that Abraham’s family did not receive until much later. Explain that you’re going to examine what sort of inheritance God has for those who are believers.

IF THERE ARE NO OTHER ADDITIONS, TRANSITION TO THE STORY.

THE STORY

- *Goal:* For students to see how God laid the foundation for a special people through His covenant with Abram.
- *Set-Up:* None.

FIRST, explain that in this lesson, you'll examine a relationship God initiated with Abram and his family. If you'd like, use the Connecting The Dots section below to review or fill in the gaps between your last lesson and this one.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

As you teach The Thread, there will naturally be some gaps in the story. This is an optional way for you to fill in some of the gaps between the last lesson you taught and this one. Use it to review or to connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- Abram is a descendant of Noah's son, Shem. Abram was born 9 generations after Shem.
- Genesis 11:29-30 tells us Abram married Sarai, and Sarai was unable to have children.
- You may have heard of a guy named Abraham in the Bible. Abram is the same guy. God changed his name from Abram to Abraham. It's common in the Bible for God to give people new names to reflect their new relationship with Him.

I Inform students that you will read three passages explaining God's relationship with Abram. Then, read or have a student read Genesis 12:1-5a. When you've finished, lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask:**

- **Look at the first verse of chapter 12. What command did God give to Abram?**
 - *Answer:* God commanded Abram to leave his country and his people and go. But He didn't tell Abram where he was going.
- **What promises did God make to Abram?**
 - *Answer:* God promised to bless Abram, make him a great nation, and make his name great.
- **What was the purpose of God's promises to Abram? Why was God going to greatly bless Abram?**
 - *Answer:* Verse 2 says, "so that you will be a blessing." Verse 3 says, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God blessed Abram so that through Abram and God's chosen people, all people would have a chance to know God's blessing.
- **What was Abram's response to God?**
 - *Answer:* Abram went just like God told him to.

THEN, explain to your students that this passage shows us God's desire to have a special people. His purpose for choosing a special people was to bless the whole world. In other words, God chose His people so that they would be the messengers of God's blessing to all other people. Explain that God would one day send Jesus as the Savior to the Israelites and the entire world.

NEXT, ask your students to turn to Genesis 15. Explain that in this chapter, Abram has some legitimate questions concerning God's promises to him. Read or have a student read Genesis 15:1-6. Then, **ask:**

- **What is Abram's first question? Why is he uncertain about God's promise to him?**
 - *Answer:* Abram still doesn't have a child to be his heir. This is a problem because God promised Abram that he would be the father of a great nation. It's hard to be the father of a great nation when you're not a father at all!

- **How does God respond to Abram's question? What picture does God give to Abram to illustrate how numerous his descendants would be?**
 - o *Answer:* God assures Abram that his heir will be his own son, not Eliezer or anyone else. He tells Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.
- **How does Abram respond to God's reassurance of His promise?**
 - o *Answer:* Abram believes God. Or we could say it another way: Abram trusts God to make good on His promises.

THEN, instruct your students to look at Genesis 15:7-16. Remind them that Abram has a second concern about God's promises. **Ask:**

- **What is Abram's second question for God?**
 - o *Answer:* Abram wants to know how he can be certain he will possess the land God promised him.
- **What does God explain to Abram about the future of his descendants?**
 - o *Answer:* God tells Abram that his descendants will be in slavery for four hundred years, but He will rescue them and give them the land He promised.
- **Can you summarize the ritual that God asked Abram to perform in verses 9-11?**
 - o *Answer:* God asked Abram to sacrifice a cow, goat, ram, turtledove, and pigeon by cutting them in half and laying the halves against each other.

NEXT, read or have a student read Genesis 15:17-21. Then, ask:

- **What was God's part of the ritual?**
 - o *Answer:* God appeared as a smoking pot and a torch and passed between the animal sacrifices.
- **Okay, we know a ritual is symbolic. Can anyone remember ever having learned anything about this covenant ritual and what it symbolizes?**
 - o *Answer:* Unpack this for your students. Explain to your students that God's answer to Abram's second question is very different from the first one. God asks Abram to prepare for a ritual that symbolizes God's covenant with him.
- **Does anyone know what a covenant is? How is a covenant different from a contract?**
 - o *Answer:* A contract is dependent on both parties upholding what they agreed to. If you uphold your end of the deal, then I'll uphold my end. A covenant is different because both parties do what they have agreed to, regardless of the other party. I do my part, even if you fail to uphold your end.
- **Why is this an important distinction to understand in this passage?**
 - o *Answer:* God will create His people even if Abram doesn't perfectly uphold his end of the agreement. God is calling His people based on His character and His promises, not on the people's worthiness.
- **How does the ritual illustrate God's covenant and commitment to Abram and his future descendants?**
 - o *Answer:* Only God walks through the sacrificed animals. He is symbolically stating that He will keep His promise regardless of Abram's, or his descendants', ability to keep the promise.
- **What does this teach us about the character of God?**
 - o *Answer:* He is faithful, even when we are faithless. He does what He promises even if we don't hold up our end of the deal. This is called God's covenant faithfulness.

NEXT, tell your students to go to Genesis 21:1-7. Explain that in this passage, we'll see an example of God keeping His covenant with Abram, now known as Abraham. Read or have a student read Genesis 21:1-7. **Ask:**

- **How do we see God keeping His promise to Abraham in this passage?**
 - o *Answer:* God blesses Abraham and Sarah (formerly Sarai) with a son, just like He promised.
- **Now Abraham has a son who will be his heir. What will Isaac inherit from his father as his heir?**
 - o *Answer:* Your students will likely come up with the obvious inheritance of property. Make sure to point out to them that if God is going to build a people from Abraham's descendants, then He is also going to use Isaac to birth a great nation. As heir, Isaac is not only receiving his father's possessions but also inheriting God's promises.

FINALLY, acknowledge to your students that they may be asking how on earth this story impacts their lives. "Who cares if God made a promise to Abraham thousands of years ago?" Assure them this story has massive implications for them, which they will see as you look at one more passage.

IF STUDENTS DON'T HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, TRANSITION INTO THE THREAD AND DISCOVER WHERE WE SEE THE CONNECTION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE BIG-PICTURE NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE.

THE THREAD

FIRST, instruct your students to turn to Galatians 3:25-29. Remind them that the descendants of Abraham were to be God's chosen people so that His people would be a blessing to all the "families" of the earth. Also, remind them that God had been faithful to His promise to give a son to Abraham and Sarah.

Read or have a student read Galatians 3:25-26. **Ask something like this:**

- **How do these verses describe our relationship with God?**
 - *Answer:* We are sons and daughters of God. (Important Note: While this passage uses masculine language, it still includes women. We are sons and daughters of God.)
- **What does God require of us to be considered His sons or daughters?**
 - *Answer:* Faith and faith alone.
- **In your own words, describe faith. When the Bible instructs us to have faith, what is it asking us to do?**
 - *Answer:* Faith is trust. The Bible urges us to completely trust Jesus, His crucifixion, and His resurrection to save us from sin and death. Here's the mind-blowing truth in these verses: just like God chose Abraham based on his faith and not his works, He also adopts us into His family by our faith, not our works. When we place our faith in Jesus, God brings us into His family as sons and daughters. We become members of His chosen family, the same family God promised Abraham thousands of years ago.

NEXT, read or have a student read Galatians 3:27-28. Before they read, you might want to remind them that at the time Galatians was written, Jews did not consider Gentiles, slaves, or women as equals but more like second-class citizens. Explain to your students that when we're adopted into Jesus' family, we become brothers and sisters with a diverse group of people. We're now family with people we might not have even acknowledged previously. **Ask something like:**

- **Are you encouraged by this truth? In what ways?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **How does it make you feel to know you are connected with a vast, diverse family through Christ?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, read or have a student read verse 29. **Tell your students that this verse ties our lesson together by making it clear that believers in Jesus are now heirs to the same promise God made to Abraham.**

- **What does it mean to you to know that you are included in God's chosen people and an heir to God's promises?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Think back to Genesis 12, the passage we started with, and answer this question: "Why?" For what purpose did God adopt you into His family? (Think back to why God chose Abraham's family at the beginning)**
 - *Answer:* You were blessed so that you might be a blessing. God blessed us by adopting us into His family so that we, like Abraham's family, could be a blessing to others.

IF THERE ARE NO MORE QUESTIONS, TRANSITION TO WRAPPING UP.

WRAPPING UP

- *Goal:* For students to consider ways in which the Gospel has the potential to bring people together who may otherwise not be.
- *Set-Up:* Paper and pens or pencils. Or you could use a board and dry-erase markers.

FIRST, hand out a piece of paper and a pen or pencil to every student in your group. Ask them to think of as many different groups or cliques in their school as they possibly can. Instruct them to write down a brief description or name of each group around the edge of the paper so that there's a huge blank space in the middle of the page.

NEXT, once they have a decent number of groups written down, ask them to create a list of things that make each of those groups unique.

THEN, instruct them to write Jesus' name in the middle of the page. Ask them to consider how these different groups might be able to connect with each other if Jesus were the unifying factor in their lives. (Examples might include forgiveness, grace, adoption, mission, or many other implications of the Gospel) They can draw lines, make notes, or do anything else that visually shows connection through Christ. The point is to help them visualize that knowing Christ brings unity between people in the vitally important aspects of their lives.

FINALLY, lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask:**

- **What are some characteristics you wrote down that separate people from each other?**
- **What are some characteristics that unite people?**
- **How does knowing Christ change how you see other people? Treat other people? Value other people?**

If students don't have any more questions or comments, challenge them to implement this teaching this week, seeing others as Christ sees them and being the unifying factor that draws people together. Then, close in prayer.

- If you've purchased the corresponding devotional journal, remind students they'll be working through Week 1 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions and to give memorizing this week's verse their best shot.
- If you're utilizing the digital devotions included in the Thread curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well that you want to share?
- Something that didn't work that you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns at feedback@youthministry360.com.